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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine competencies which teacher trainees should master. The following five competencies were hypothesized as important influences on learning disabled (LD) students' learning of word-attack skills: stating behavioral objectives, matching instruction to objectives, teaching rather than dispensing instruction, positive verbal reinforcing, and overlearning--extended practice on a newly introduced skill. Ten supervising teachers in ten elementary classrooms and 31 student teachers engaged in a year-long study comparing three methods of teaching reading to LD students. A total of 194 observations were made in these classrooms, with one supervisor and as many as five student teachers involved in each class. Measurement and analysis of LD student reading achievement showed that all five competencies were present in the classrooms providing the most effective instruction and that the following three competencies were frequently absent in the least effective classrooms: matching instruction to objectives, positive reinforcing, and overlearning. (JM)

Some Teacher Competencies That May Influence Disabled Readers' Learning of Word Attack Skills

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A rational approach to teacher training requires that trainees master competencies which make a difference in students' learning. Comparative reading studies, while failing to indicate that one method or material is clearly superior, have consistently reported significant differences among teachers. (Dykstra, 1968; Sheldon, 1967). Attempts to specify things that effective teachers of disabled readers do, however, have been less successful. (Moore et al, 1973).

One way to identify competencies which influence students' learning is to make in-depth observations of teachers' performance and to specify what the effective teachers are doing that the ineffective teachers are not doing. This procedure was used by Durkin (1974) to identify common teacher errors in phonics instruction. It might be inferred from Durkin's observations that ability to present relevant word attack instruction is among the competencies required by reading teachers.

Following identification of competencies through observation, teacher educators need to isolate those competencies presumed significant and to explore them in controlled studies. Shores, Cegelka and Nelson (1973) have concluded in their summary of such studies that there is sufficient evidence to support a positive approach to behavior management as a competency for those who teach exceptional children. Summaries of the effects of mastery learning on students' achievment (Block, 1974) also suggest that teachers may need to know how to diagnose and present correlated instruction based on specific objectives. This approach may be especially important for low aptitude students (Burrows & Okey, 1975).

Competencies Selected for Study

Five competencies, based on the above works plus the author's previous observations of reading and learning disabilities teachers, were hypothesized as important influences on LD students' learning of word attack skills:

1. Teachers should write behavioral objectives for reading instruction.
2. Instruction presented should precisely match the objective.
3. Teachers should teach lessons, not just hand out worksheets and/or listen to students read.
4. During instruction, teachers should manage students' attending behavior by using positive verbal reinforcement.
5. Following presentations of the lesson, teachers should provide extensive opportunities for extended practice on the skill introduced (overlearning).

Method

Sample. Ten elementary LD resource rooms, in which special education teachers supervised University of Kentucky undergraduate and graduate student teachers, were selected for observation. Thirty-one student teachers worked in these classrooms during the course of the target year. A total of 194 observations were made, each lasting approximately one hour. In each classroom there were from one to five student teachers during the school year, in addition to the supervisor.

Instrumentation. All ten supervisors and 31 student teachers were involved in a year-long study comparing three methods of teaching reading to 53 randomly selected LD students. This is described in more detail elsewhere (Morsink & Venable, 1976). Students' reading achievement during this study was measured in four different ways, as follows:

1. Pre to posttest growth on the Wide Range Achievement Test - Reading Subtest (Jastak & Jastak, 1965): (a) first semester, (b) whole year.

2. Total effectiveness of individual educational plan (IEP) for each student: (a) first semester, (b) whole year.

3. Annual mastery of word attack skills on the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skills Development: Word Attack tests (WDRS:WA, Otto & Askov, 1972).

4. Years' end retention of word attack skills on WDRSD:WA.

Identification of successful classrooms. Reading achievement for the LD students was analyzed on the four above variables. In each classroom there were four to nine experimental students on whom these scores were based.

For the first semester, three classrooms in which students made the greatest WRAT-R grade level achievement (1.05 +.87, +.83), and three in which ss made the least growth (+.26, +.30, +.35) were identified. Three classrooms with greatest growth (+1.6, +1.0, +.9) and two with least growth (+.5, +.5) could be clearly identified from annual gain scores.

Total effectiveness of the IEPs was evaluated by identifying the classrooms in which the largest percentage of ss had successful educational plans. Each individual's plan was judged successful if it resulted in increases in the rate and accuracy of oral reading and included $\geq$ 1:1 growth on the WRAT-R for each month of instruction. Each semester the IEPs were evaluated as effective (+), partly effective (0), or ineffective)-). For each classroom, the number of ineffective IEPs were subtracted from the number of effective IEPs; this was divided by the total number of ss in the group to obtain a percentage of effectiveness. One classroom (+33%) was identified as most effective the first

TABLE 1

Most Effective/Least Effective Classrooms Coded By Number, As Determined By Student Growth Along Six Dimensions

	Most Effective	Least Effective
WRAT-R Semester 1	7* 8* 2	4** 9** 3
WRAT-R Annual	7 8 5	9 1 -
IEP Effectiveness Semester 1	7 - -	4 3 9
IEP Effectiveness Semester 2	10* 8 3	1 9 -
WDRSA:WA Mastery	10 8 7	4 2 3
WDRSA:WA Retention	10 8 1	4 2 -

*3 Consistently Most Effective
**2 Consistently Least Effective

semester, while three were identified as least effective (-83%, -75%, -50%). Three were identified as most effective (+100%, +67%, +67%) and two as least effective (-50%, +20%) in the annual evaluation.

Some of the ss in each classroom had been randomly assigned to a reading method in which the WDRSD:WA was used as a supplement to basal instruction. The average number of WDRSD:WA skills obtained by these children in each classroom were used to identify three most successful (+5.5, +5.5, +4.3) and two least successful classrooms (+1, +0). Skills originally mastered minus those which ss failed to retain were used to identify three classrooms which were most effective (+5, +4, +4) and two which were least effective (+1, +0).

The most effective and least effective classrooms along these four dimensions are shown by code number in Table 1. This data display makes it possible to identify three classrooms in which reading instruction, as measured by achievement, was clearly effective, and two in which it appeared consistently ineffective.

Insert Table 1

Observation of teacher competencies. During each classroom observation, the author recorded dichotomously whether or not the student teacher demonstrated each of the target competencies. This number was divided by the total number of observations on that student teacher to obtain a ratio. The year's end ratio for each classroom on each competency was the average of all student teachers who had worked in that classroom plus that of the supervising teacher. Each supervising teacher was

assigned a rating of .20 - 1.00 (from a scale of 1 - 5) based subjectively on her overall demonstration of that competency. When student teachers were present in a classroom all year, their average and the teacher's score received equal weights; when there were only two (rather than four or five) students placed in the classroom, the supervising teacher's score was given twice the weight of the student teacher's averages. The rationale for this was that supervising teachers had more direct contact with children in classrooms with fewer student teachers.

Competency 1, objectives, was judged on whether the student teacher's behavioral objective met criteria. Evaluation of supervising teachers' objectives was purely subjective, since their lesson plans were never examined. Percentages of demonstration of this competency for the three classrooms previously identified as most effective were 98%, 95%, 95%. Those for the two classrooms previously identified as least effective were 87%, 57%.

Competency 2, matching instruction to objective, was evaluated through observation of teaching. The "matching" competency was judged present when instruction presented would enable children to meet the objective. For example, when the objective was word attack, instruction should emphasize word attack rather than word meaning, and instruction should give ss practice in applying skills to unknown words; instruction on consonant digraphs in initial position should not feature consonant digraphs in the final position; direct child-contact time should stress instruction on skills, rather than independent activities such as cutting and pasting pictures of skill words. Average percentages of competency #2 were found for the three most effective classrooms (100%, 98%, 91%) and for the two least effective classrooms (35%, 24%).

Competency 3, teaching rather than dispensing instruction, was evaluated by observation of individual and small group teaching. This behavior was recorded as present when the teacher was actively instructing students, and not present when the lesson consisted solely of a teacher's listening to a child read aloud while correcting errors, then handing out worksheets for ss to complete independently. Average percentages were found for the three most effective classrooms (100%, 95%, 90%) and for the two least effective (68%, 44%).

Competency 4, positive verbal reinforcement, was judged as present when the student teacher stated behavioral expectations to ss at the beginning of the lesson, then praised ss whose responses were appropriate while ignoring others. It was not present when she forgot to state expectations, failed to reinforce ss with acceptable behavior, or gave frequent reprimands for inappropriate behavior. The percentages for the three most effective classrooms were 100%, 90%, and 85%, while those for the two least effective were 36% and 34%.

Competency 5, overlearning, was judged present if the lesson was a review of previous instruction and/or if presentation was followed by horizontal practice on the skill (games, worksheets, correlated language arts activities, or practice using AV equipment). It was not present when the teacher simply introduced a skill, concept, or word list but failed to provide follow-up. Percentages for the three most effective classrooms were 94%, 90%, and 82%, while those for the two least effective were 31% and 20%.

Results and Discussion

The three classrooms identified, on the basis of ss's reading achievement, as the most effective were the same three in which the selected teaching competencies were observed the highest percentage of the time. The two classrooms identified as least effective had the lowest ratings on three of the five competencies. This indicated that the same five teacher competencies were found consistently in the classrooms providing the most effective instruction, while three of these competencies were frequently absent in the least effective classrooms.

Mean percentages for all ten classrooms and for the three highest and two lowest classrooms were computed on each of the five competencies. These are shown in Table 2. This table indicates that there were large

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Insert Table 2.

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differences between the most and least effective classrooms on three of the competencies: matching instruction, positive reinforcement, and overlearning, with smaller differences on objectives and on teaching vs. dispensing instruction.

The limitations of the study - the small student N per classroom, the use of subjective ratings for supervising teacher's competence, and the lack of intraobserver reliability on student teaching data are acknowledged. Tht subjects' behavior differed in the absence of the observer is also always a possibility in observational studies. However, it is also noted that in no case did the rating indicate the competency of a

TABLE 2

Average Percentage of Time Behavior Was Present During Observations

Behavior	Total $\bar{X}$.	$\bar{X}$.3 Most Effective	$\bar{X}$.2 Least Effective	Difference Most-Least
Planning	.82	.96	.70	.26
Teaching, not "Dispensing"	.70	.95	.56	.39
Overlearning	.60	.89	.26	.60
Matching to Objective	.65	.96	.29	.67
Reinforcement (Rules, Praise, Ignoring)	.63	.92	.35	.57

single teacher; in every instance it more nearly described the "average behavior" of all two to six adults observed working with LD children in that classroom during the year.

For the two competencies on which average differences between most and least effective classrooms were smaller, lack of importance should not be inferred. Planning, featuring behavioral objectives, was required of student teachers with remediation provided for those who did not meet criteria. The other low-difference competency - teaching vs. dispensing instruction - was probably most effected by the observer's presence, since student teachers frequently scheduled observations for times when they would be engaged in direct instructional activities.

The need for competency in positive reinforcement by teachers of exceptional learners has already been demonstrated (Shores, Cegelka, & Nelson, 1973). Two additional teaching competencies: matching instruction to objectives, and providing overlearning of skills - seem, on the basis of the data collected during these observations, to be good candidates for future validation through controlled study.

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